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## **Conservationists Nearly Double Water Flow in Abo Arroyo**

MOUNTAINAIR, NM-The Claunch-Pinto Soil & Water Conservation District is taking a stand against salt cedar, and enlisting the help of others in doing so. Old photographs dating back to 1905 of Abo Arroyo in the Mountainair area show a landscape with no salt cedar. This was a far cry from what nine landowners along the stream there were facing in 2005. But since then the flow in the arroyo has nearly double, thanks to conservation measures.

Addressing the salt cedar problem in Abo Arroyo became important to the Claunch-Pinto Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), State of New Mexico and its departments and agencies, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, and federal government because, as a tributary of the Rio Grande, the arroyo is a seed source for invasive plants like salt cedar as well as beneficial vegetation for large areas downstream. Salt cedar is a non-native plant that sucks up enormous amounts of water.

The State of New Mexico initially tackled the salt cedar choking Abo Arroyo by channeling funds that were administered by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture under the Upper Rio Grande Phreatophyte Control Program to treat this invasive species. This initial attack of aerial application was followed with mechanical removal of salt cedar that had been treated and green standing stock. New Mexico State Forestry supplied the third strike to the infestation with Wildland-Urban Interface Funds to remove dead and standing salt cedar.

Ridding Abo Arroyo of salt cedar was only half the battle, however. The land managers had a choice of waiting to see whether in fifty years native plants had taken over or helping the process along and doing some proactive conservation work. They chose the conservation work.

Enlisting the resources of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Los Lunas Plant Materials Center the landowners and conservation interests started restoration using 2200 coyote willow whips the Plant Materials Center provided. They also initiated the planting of 2200 upland grass plugs, but after installing 600 had to put the project on hold because the window of opportunity closed.

“We left the rest of the grasses at the Plant Materials Center for them to baby-sit over the winter,” said Louis King, Mountainair, NRCS District Conservationist. “Things just dried out too much in the upland sites, with the lack of moisture this year, to risk planting any more. We will wait until next year’s window opens to proceed.”

King reports the site really looks good without the salt cedar, and that some alkali sacaton and other residual beneficial native plants are starting to come into the area now that the salt cedar is gone. Sedges in the riparian zone are also really doing well.

And, the proof of the return to a healthy landscape is the amount of water in the arroyo that has nearly doubled at the monitoring points.

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